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# HIPS & HAWS

POEMS BY A. E. COPPARD



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TO  
WINIFRED TUDOR OWEN



## *Truant*

**H**IDE all your snares, vain town  
Gilded with cross and crown,  
Lest your foul streams deter  
The day's new worshipper.

Break in my heart, O chains,  
Your self-inflicted pains,  
And every shackle fall  
From me for good and all.

Let the grey dawn propose  
Conjunction with the rose,  
And the blue noon fulfil  
Indolently its will.

Where the warm vales repeat  
The ecstasy of heat,  
And the slow forest heaves  
In transport all its leaves,

I can uplift my eyes  
To th' enduring paradise,  
And cast white flames in the air  
Of proud unsecret prayer.

## *The Horse*

**W**HO comes from far away, what old grey man,  
Into these coloured fields where the verdure flows  
Dimpled and sweet?

Unshackling gates and pinning them again  
He comes with a bag of corn,  
With gentle gesture comes  
To con the agued horse that mourns by the waterside  
Unprofitably sick.  
He pours before that wreck,  
Its shrivelled clay sharpened with acrid bones,  
A bag of teasing oats;  
The wind tosses the husks in yellow rain to the sky,  
Where the pied lapwings turning in the noon  
Twinkle like daylight stars.

The horse bites not, bends not, moves not,  
It stands like stone,  
Though its stone shadow shakes in the wrinkled waves  
That move one way,  
And its anguish is nudged by the blown shadow of clouds  
That move another.

Meek old man,  
It will bite no more, it will leap no more,  
It will lie down in the rich summer grasses  
And today or tomorrow it will abandon you.

## *The Way to Tipperary*

WHAT are these passengers that stray about the road  
Undriven, unbereft  
Of their ease and sweet of the world!

One time it is hens, hesitant,  
With blink of the furtive eye and snap of the bill;  
Or lambs trotting;  
And there's a gallant young gander.

The pig grunts,  
The ass brays,  
The dog snarls,  
The bullock pauses,  
But my courage abides and I pass on.

And on either hand  
The fields gather up their grace,  
The forest calls with the grandeur of its deep voice,  
The hills toss the smoke from their temples,  
And I salute them—  
Salute them with my farewell.

Is the lot of a man this only for ever:  
To be saying goodbye to beauty?  
Could I turn myself into a pig or a tree,  
To what should I say goodbye?

## *The Streams*

**H**IDDEN by sweet bushes, where blooms an acacia tree,  
Let a river be turning among its rocks;  
I would sit on the bridge and think my thoughts—  
The red streams of my heart to be going about  
In riot among the rocks of the mind,  
And to be cloven by them—  
Until the light was smitten from the hills,  
And little splashing stars  
Were come to be walking with the moon.

Now in this quiet house,  
The door and the half door bolted,  
The woman with down-fallen hair smiles strangely towards me:  
The clock is ticking,  
The bird hops in its cage,  
The child stirs not from its slumber:  
Beautiful are her glances to me  
As she lights the tall candle.



## *The Lock*

**E**ASY is unhappiness, difficult is joy:

The word of the lark is flowing out of the sky,  
The duck goes about her swimming,  
The dace at the eyot,  
The lily and the oak,  
Utter their comeliness:  
But heavy is the lock upon the door.

They have withdrawn to some malignant altar  
The delicate fair body of love,  
The coral laughter and the peacock wings  
The lily-woven breasts,  
All its infrangible signs  
Scarred with the wounds of anger;  
And they have sealed up their capricious grove  
With all its terrible bars  
With wards of iron and with tongues of flint

Till they have beaten with their whips,  
Till their imperial chalices are full,  
Till the gods receive  
Their ultimate harvests,  
Though the word of the lark is flowing out of the sky  
Easy is unhappiness, difficult is joy.

## *The Oracle*

NIGHT has come truly now,  
And delicately starred.  
The ancient songs of evening cease  
In the cloaked thickets,  
The gabble of the pasture is given over,  
Recumbent are the herds  
And the ewes.

A golden-breasted dove, the yellow moon, sits in the elm  
Confronting me.

O yellow moon in the elm  
Why is love's course  
Less brief than honour's?

## *Eclipse*

**A**LL these things:

The hum of gnats in the thorn,  
The wild bee's hymn,  
The tongues of the oak sighing.

And sainfoin lying on the old pasture like a Paisley shawl,  
The caterpillar cocoon like a purse of wax on the briar,  
The crown of a forest flowing like slow sea,  
The mute triumphant languor of the grass.

I lie in a nook of bloom,  
In the shadowed interval between turf and tree—  
For the swart sky is all one arch of brass  
Over a ridge of granite.

And a lark is speaking to close heaven:  
Not of God and his judgments,—  
Yielding no victory, taking no passionate blame,—  
Nor of the rack of the world,  
Nor of love whose anguish is far deeper than its boon;  
But he speaks only  
Of honied hills and places of green peace.

Then, O then . . . .  
Smoke of shot in the glade,  
The stricken dove!

## *The Sapling*

*To Agnes G. Evans.*

**T**HE little acacia has begun to bloom,  
There are five sprigs upon each of its five boughs,  
And a bully finch within this very hour  
Has hopped upon each one sagaciously,  
Beholding them with pleasure  
And meditating fitly.

No,  
Lean little acacia,  
Laggard unthrift tree,  
I do not think the finch  
Will choose the best of your attenuate boughs  
To cram a nest of tidiness with eggs,  
Dumpy and five;  
One careful bird may dare upon your pride  
What six would lap with ruin.

O patient spiritless twig  
Your fellows in the garden,  
Those rods that will be roses,  
Those buds that will be plums,  
Or blossom into pear,  
The rolling lilac, and the tulip high  
That flames with holy bloom,  
Regard you not,  
All these, all these, regard you not at all.

And yet, O yet, some frosty morn may rise  
To harry them with wind, and heap  
Snow upon the laburnums.  
Some day of brass may dawn,

The fiery sun  
Plying an arduous sickle  
To reap them into limbo.  
Or on some frantic night  
The moon,  
Slim lilac Venus,  
May drop upon their pride  
Despisingly.

Wherefore, little acacia—I'm sorry about that bird—  
You shall not covet bloom nor branch, the sum  
Of distant joys is yours, is in you:  
There are more things in the earth, my dear acacia,  
Than are apparent, as yet, in your economy.

## *Storm on the Heath*

SURELY the body of night will die in this storm,  
Dark wounded night be slain in its own tempest!  
Calamity, the prodigious beast,  
Sharpens its claw of thunder,  
Its mouthing darkness gnashes from the skies;  
Frighted with iron roars  
The earth itself will shrink into the sea.

Windily these havocs,  
Athwart the unrigid gulfs of firmament,  
In dissonant fugues collide,  
And, like trapped furies, flash upon the heath.  
The few trees are doomed,  
Thin-bodied birds may cleave to their racks in the hedges  
But the larch will fall.

If there were stars  
They would be torn from their pivots,  
The moon tossed from her giant anchor;  
But the blown blackness of earth and sky  
Hangs up a wall,  
A roaring gloom imponderable,  
Till earth from sky cannot be dissevered.

Two thick yellow stars,  
The gig lanterns,  
Emerge;  
The dark wall closes solidly behind them;  
The faint clack clack of the cob  
Driven so late to the mill  
Follows fadingly,  
And fades.

Now, like a suffering bride,  
Night forbears to contend;  
Passion is dying, it will surely die.  
Tomorrow the heath will bloom with modest beams,  
Again with modest beams,  
Tranquil, unpeccant, lovely and benign,  
Its nooks strewn with cones from the fallen larch  
And a few thin-bodied finches that will sing no more.

## *Country Sabbath*

**W**HY does he loaf in his garden,  
That rich man,  
Looking so idly into the air?

The huge uprearing sky has a million lures:  
The wind connives at its coy mischief,  
Dust is gone upon curtains of visible air,  
The unreluctant elm is passionately tossed,  
And seven pale doves are thrown like stars  
Under the black cloud.

Servant of grief and bereavement,  
A poor crude female,  
Bowed and uncomely mourns upon the road  
Trundling a bassinette filled with a fat pink child;  
As snug as honey in wards of wax it lies,  
The flesh growing rosily upon it,  
The fat making its pleasant curves.  
Under the elm the mourning women loiter, under the cloud,  
And at the porch of the Baptist chapel  
Where the invoking choir perfunctorily drones  
Of 'Jesus, blessed Jesus!'  
She tarries long in sadness and humility.

Why does he not leave looking in the sky,  
That rich man?  
Are there not in the garden  
Primroses and broccoli,  
And an arbour of woven willow?



## *The Bride*

I COULD not look into those eyes;  
I could not see with my own eyes at all  
The silver body,  
Nor the hair of musk—  
That honied venture of a mind  
Whose thoughts are snow white birds,  
Their wings moving with music,  
Their voices  
Flutes in the amorous dusk.

Those purposed raptures,  
Delicate things of doom,  
They die on the empty air,  
They flame and die,  
O mute invisible bride,  
They pass from the lips of God  
Like drops fall'n from the bill of a drinking bird.

I too,  
I too shall lapse  
Into the loom of the grass  
When time and vain eternity instal  
Their daft horizons, and I yield  
To them the irrelevant victory.  
But what word, what word oracular,  
Shall be heard in the terraces then?  
To what remembered twilight will you come,  
O mute invisible bride?

## *Geography on the Jew's Harp*

*SIR, what is Eldorado, then?*

It is a town of truthful men  
Who puff into the firmament  
The pluming pipes of sweet content,  
Till maps of the sky enchanted glow  
With continents of piled snow,  
Towers and celestial palaces,  
Wherein the venturing Quixote sees  
Trim shapes of laughing girls that dance  
Unveiled before him. Half askance  
He from those dithyrambic skies  
Averts the shadow of his eyes  
And, kicked on his unrejoicing hams  
With sevenfold everlasting dams,  
Explores for Eldorado where  
The gifts of God are seemlier:  
In Oskaloosa, Thame, Tamboff,  
In Bath, for instance, Chickakoff,  
The Grindstone Island, Alabama,  
Ypsilanti, Yokohama—  
For all these marvellous names refer  
To Master Lloyd his register,  
Though some as patently I drew  
From Bacon or Bartholomew.

But Eldorado's holy sign  
Is neither north nor south the Line,  
In Joppa, Lampeter, nor Cork,  
The Gulf of Guinea, Sneem, New York.  
'Twas told to me by curious people  
The sign was lodged beneath a steeple,

And that sublime extravagance  
Led me many a devilish dance  
For neither half o' the hemisphere  
Housed Eldorado anywhere.  
I much fear these simple races  
Avert themselves from our bad places,  
And in the zones above our hats  
Go chanting long magnificats.  
O that some heavenly Baedeker,  
With suave propitiating purr  
Soliciting large benefits  
For Saginaw or Biarritz,  
Would by discreet parenthesis  
Discover where the lost town is!

Behind his golden unlocked gates  
The King of Eldorado waits,  
But not in Cutch, nor Chittaboon,  
Burnham Beeches, Saskatoon,  
Ord of Caithness—he'd prefer  
Kalamazoo to Axminster—  
Port of Peter, Port of Spain,  
Round the world, and round again,  
Stow-on-the-Wold, Chicago, quick!  
Kirjath-jearim, Hackney Wick. . . .

Avast, avast there, having curled,  
Like the equator, round the world,  
Vex not its truthless disarray:  
World without end, belay! belay!

## *Andante*

NOW dusk, now sleep,  
The night with honied sleep,  
Deep drownèd sleep.

But the nimble stars  
Noursle and poise and yearn, and in the mere  
Drop their white buds to honour that gradual horn,  
Whose mute cadenzas now so whitely rise.

In dove-delighting woods the limber bough  
Unshakes its chrism of dew.  
Sways not the lilied stem,  
The rose not sways;  
But the wind's unknown thoughts among the cocksfoot grasses  
In tranquil litanies mingle and mourn and wane.

No song so soft but yet these reedy lips  
More softly sigh.  
No night so dark but yet its lovely glooms  
Enrich the strange trees.  
No star so dim but yet its crystal eye  
Glimmers with salutations.

The eyeing heavens  
Noursle and poise and yearn,  
And like a silent passionate woman  
Earth, the beloved, lies but does not sleep.

## *Summer Night's Rain*

**T**HIS shower thrown from the air  
Is brief and beautiful as the marriage tears of a virgin  
When night has come,  
Night like a shagged old maid  
Come to unsuit the bride.

Honied is the heart of the orchard  
Loosening its tired blooms:  
Their flakes of silence fall  
Like the delicate feet of dreams  
That leave a magical sweetness in the world.  
The flag's wide lips are locked;  
The breasts are cold  
Of dissolute roses dying in the briar.

Now the shower fades on the breeze, the night fulfils  
With sharp unwrinkled stars.  
Come moon, loving moon, behind your secret hill  
Wounding with white wonder the attentive sky.

## *A Carol for Margaret Chester*

*DING* dong, *Noël*, *ding dong*,  
Sings the bell of the Holy Dawn;  
*Ding Dong*, flickering in madrigals.

*Ding dong*, *Noël*, *ding dong*,  
Come and adore Him.  
The ox turns from its crib,  
The fish that swims in water clear  
Hangs like a dream,  
The starling chuckles in the thorn,  
The goose is smoothing its breast,  
All for the Little Boy that is to look after the sheep.

*Ding dong*, *Noël*, *ding dong*.  
The cockerels upon the axle perched—  
The white cock that crows  
And the red cock that fights—  
Let down their comforted claws,  
All for the Little Boy that is to look after the sheep;  
But the gold cock that flutters and spins  
Still sleeps in the wind.

*Ding dong*, *Noël*, *ding dong*.  
Strange shepherds, old shepherds,  
Shepherds from reed-roofed pens,  
Come over the hill,  
*Ding dong*,  
With milk and honey and blackbirds baked in a pie.  
*Ding dong*, *Noël*, *ding dong*.  
The falling crumbs gladden the thin mice,  
Who are but three and blind as any stone,  
Lodging in a round black hole under the manger.

Blow your horn, come, blow your horn,  
Here hovers the trembling star!  
Light the fire, light the fire,  
Those lost wise people coming in from the fen  
Are covered with white frore dew,  
And the sky leans cold as the curved sails of a ship!

Carols the blacksmith's anvil,  
Ching . . . ching . . . ching . . . ching,  
And the bells of the Holy dawn  
*Dong ding . . . dong ding . . . dong ding,*  
Flicker in madrigals,  
All for the Little Boy that is to look after the sheep.

*Ding dong, Noël,*  
    *Ding dong, Noël,*  
        *Ding dong, Noël,*  
            *Ding . . . dong!*

## *The Obsequies*

**M**ARCH not so slowly, you compassionate soldiers,  
With guns slanting to earth;  
Pass quickly, fifes and drums,  
Nor mock with deliberate stride  
The eager wings of death,  
The querulous pace of the living.

Hurry, O hurry, you, hurry him away,  
This captain who was once an ironmonger,  
Into that shocking grave.  
Cease, deep bell;  
Horror has fall'n upon him like a bolt,  
And all the ardours that encompassed him  
Are faint with those wreathes, those wreathes.

Pass quickly desolate drums, reluctant fifes,  
Stabbing with practised melancholy  
This bright uncomprehending world.  
Sad soldiers, with your grave-denoting guns,  
Pass on, pass on.



## *The Glorious Survivors*

**W**E like you, Glorious Dead:  
You are so amiable, amenable.  
For two moments a year  
We share your creditable silence,  
It is so profitable and so profound,  
You help us to think thoughts peaceful and holy,  
And we are dumb,  
Ecstatically insane.

But you, Insuperable Residuum,  
What is to be done with you  
Who died a threefold death and yet survive?  
You are anachronisms,  
Unpeaceable things like Russians and Irishmen.  
Do not speak of ideals, do not shout of triumph,  
(Before whose smoking gun  
Bloodless as a reed the dead one lies):  
No one has ever seen a vision without fear,  
And we who are whole need not to see visions,  
We need only peace and humility.  
Once having lived the life of the dead  
Why can't you hawk your collar studs in silence  
And vend your matches with a meeker air?  
We can praise, O devoutly we can praise  
The glorious death of the dead,  
But the death of the living why should we magnify?  
If we cannot think our peaceful and holy thoughts  
We must vomit;  
And remember,  
We have truncheons for you, guns for you,  
Ah, we can give you bayonets and beans!

## *The Young Man under the Walnut Tree*

**O**BSERVE the rotund galleries of this walnut tree,  
Its shales of dull stiff wax  
Ushering a pool of air, a pool and a green pavilion,  
Wherein, sweet tyrant sun, the majesty of shade  
Dips a forefinger gilded with your bloom  
To paint her modest brows.

Behold the wimpling rye,  
The ewes, the poppies steeped in flagrant sun,  
Silent, silent, silent; but the lark  
Flying as it sings, singing only as it flies,  
Spices with diamond noise the gleaming air.

O golden world, that in your glorious dust  
Treasures the trick of Being,  
How we, all credulous, obey you!  
We are but the habits of the earth,  
Its passion for similitude,  
For forms and forms again and forms.  
This fond bereavement from oblivion,  
This thrusting of pale buds from out the branching darkness,  
Was once with langour, with besieging sleep,  
Lapped like a dream within a dream  
Till life, life in a splendid pause,  
Began its crepitation,  
Broke into form, engendering from the dust,  
Walnuts and things like me,  
This clutching honeysuckle drunken-fumed,  
The blind newt moving,  
And martins marvellous in the sky.

O wild sweet dust  
Dreaming the unsleeping dream  
Of flagrant poppy, honeysuckle, breeze,  
Bird in the rye, earth, life, oblivion,  
From you we follow and flow,  
To you we falter and fall,  
For you are full of love,  
Love that is born of wonder and dies on the empty air.

But love shall have days of honour,  
Ere the defeat of love,  
And fine nights to dream in  
Her deep bed of rest.

## *Yokohama Garland*

**I** BEGGED my young love to meet me,  
But she would not come.

She has a jacket of blue velvet  
That in a dim room looks like evening sky,  
There are buttons of glass upon it,  
Her yellow cap is plumed with a coiling feather;  
But of her own beauty,  
Tinge of brow, tender eye, modest tongue,  
Let speech be diffident:  
What the voice cannot utter fills the mind with echoes.

I waited, but she did not come;  
I begged my love but she, in fear of me,  
Denied not nor consented.  
There is a folly in fear that has no fear of folly,  
'Tis true, ungentle love.  
Pride and its circumstance  
Tie a pert sinew to much barren bone;  
The laughter of her companions,  
The scorn of her father  
Whose apothegms hopped about us like truculent fleas,  
Was gall to that wound of fear.  
Her elderly brother's grand appearance shamed me,  
Tho he had much to hide and so little to disclose.  
Her young sister loved me kindly  
With tenderness that waved about me like faint lilac,  
A heaven immediate;  
But the desire in my love's own breast,  
Quiet as a bird in its sanctuary bush,  
Hid and was mute, alien, trembling, chill.

I begged my young love to meet me,  
But she did not come:  
Deep down, slow sun, your arc of beauty shone  
On unseen stars and heavens no eye beholds  
Now or for ever; day's last bird rejoiced;  
Night came, the shepherd moon, the coy flock,  
And a bat with trickling flight above the dim road;  
My heart was a hesitant moth that fluttered by a lighted door.

The half-moon, cold and placid as a virtue,  
Surveyed me with its adamant eye;  
The stars poured out their glow serene and jubilant  
Upon my empty world, my world  
Void as time was but like time's self complacent,  
So endlessly complacent  
That I longed for heaven to crack to its own last judgment,  
The moon to become a dancing triangle  
Or a flaring oven to scorch this crawling orb,  
Instead of that dumb flame in chalice of blue oil.

I had a rose, a heavy crimson thing  
I got from the farrier's mate for a screw of tobacco:  
I crushed the clumsy flower in a hole in a wall  
And left it there.

O innocence and beauty  
That I can never speak of without tears,  
Long I have waited . . . . .  
But you do not come.

## *The two Nude Virgins*

NO . . . . .

I will not go into the moonlight  
Lest some infinite thing enwrap me;  
I will not move beyond the threshold,  
I will wait in the calm shadow of the door,  
And hear the sweet air  
Using the oleanders  
Lightly  
And with love.

Diana cannot hear them  
Though she stands whitely among them,  
Most white of all things,  
Beside the dark urn.  
She is covered with dew,  
Her arm is shrouding her breasts  
From the ardour of the moon.  
She is lovely,  
And she has no fear—  
Being hunched in stone.  
Shall I go out to her . . . . .?  
I would take her into my arms.  
Shall I just go  
And cool my palms in the urn  
And put them on my brow?

I will not go,  
I will wait in the calm shadow of the door.

Perhaps . . . . .

## *Simple Day*

**I**N this wind's following there is an unknown richness,  
A breathing mysterious bloom,  
Not gorse nor may nor hyacinth nor herb;  
No man could name that perfume.

The white flowers living in this field  
Stare at the sky; in the field beyond  
There are yellow flowers that nod wisely to the turf:  
And that is all.

But yes, there are clouds in the sky, soft rocks,  
The sunlight pounds them like an axe,  
The wind through its couch of blue  
Divides, diminishes and harries them,  
And innocence, perceiving this, rejoices:  
For though the wind has no colour,  
The sky no smell,  
The earth no speech,  
They survive and accomplish justice.

## *The Antic Shrine*

**I**F she will not receive me, well, that is to be borne;  
There is basking in sunshine,  
And the bland comity of the grass;  
The lustre of winged beetles—  
Those pearls without price on pins of random weed—  
Enchants and alleviates;  
The brocading flowers  
Tender their pale monotonies of assuagement,  
The coated may-tree puts  
Her cushion of soft odour into the air;  
I can listen to birds and observe the laburnums.

O but these charmed airs live but to enslave me;  
The thickets bud again  
With prongs of snow-pale blossom, sheaves of thorn,  
And gilded salley nodding with muzzy drops:  
My banished thoughts confuting me  
Slip through this chink of time;  
The old unravelled wonder,  
Like a bandit bee with booty-groping eye,  
Pursues me and entreats;  
Hope's veiled prophecies cajole once more  
The unloved lover to her antic shrine—  
Pillars of dust,  
Walls of water,  
Rafters of roving air.

O rare faint-fingered lightning  
Let fall upon our towers  
No more your tyrannous flame!  
Let me be void as this air,  
Empty of all but my arrogant will to live on,  
To live on.



I love best to lie in the sun  
Looking at winged beetles.  
Beautiful! But are they beautiful?  
Even the wing of a butterfly is much like the fin of a cod.

## *The Innkeeper's Handkerchiefs*

**T**HIS is Daniel, keeper of inns,  
Almost as old as evil, as weak as honesty,  
Silent as implacable distance;  
He has no more conversation than a gourd,  
His thoughts are remote as a meridian;  
He does not see a cross in the sky,  
And the ironical question  
Which death may dissolve but not elucidate  
Provokes him not, his heart will never break  
Against that wandering citadel.  
Well, the world is a mirror in which God sees himself.

This Daniel, keeper of inns,  
Sags on his windsor chair  
In a room above his barrels;  
Facing his own deep hearth  
He sags on the windsor chair  
In a long fidelity of silence,  
Letting stiff silence slake itself in him  
Until the divine alarum shall signify  
That Daniel goes to judgment,  
Wrapped in the just sufficient earth that chains  
Alike the heart of Cæsar and Bill Brown.

The mantel-shelf proclaims his faith in time,  
For two clocks there divide  
Hour from dull hour:  
One dark and tall, with uncouth bell,  
In a cabinet that towers among the dark rafters,  
And one with a yellow face and small,  
The face of a marigold,  
And a tinkled hour:  
They do not tick together but they tell the same time.

There is nothing in this old man, keeper of inns,  
He exudes nonentity.  
He does not mourn, he does not mourn for youth,  
That vessel of inutile hungers  
With a virtue in every vein,  
That lissom shadow dogged by a bodily shade.  
He mourns not past or future,  
Nothing, he has nothing to mourn,  
Neither the lapse of days  
Nor the plague of memories,  
Blames misincurred and ecstasies foregone,  
Voided, unrecked, dissolved,  
Times that pressed honey upon him when the tongue was sour  
Or gall when the tongue was sweet.  
There is nothing in this old man, keeper of inns.

If the day be cold  
Daniel stares in the fire with dying eyes,  
Listening to emptiness with dying ears;  
Ambition ease or truth, malice affliction love,  
Move him no more at all,  
The tower of this old man  
Is propped no longer by such crooked pins;  
Only upon his knees  
Forever rests a coloured handkerchief  
To staunch the rheum that jets in his gross eye;  
It is a red handkerchief.

So also if the day be warm:  
He squats in the self place  
Fronting an empty hob  
And the tapping clocks that disinter his doom;  
He wipes his forehead with a handkerchief  
That lies in his lap for half an hour or more;  
It is a blue handkerchief.

## *Midwinter Night's Dream*

**B**LACK night is thronged,  
Wind-fluttered stars  
Heap the bewildered air with rippling garnets.

Tossing, perplexing,  
Vast glooms confound the world;  
The tidal winds rack and recede;  
The whelmèd forest lies on its own floor  
Consumed in powerful orisons;  
Low, like mourning love,  
The spruce is sighing  
And the cypress sighs.

Black lovely world,  
Your absconding oracle smokes in this dewless wind,  
Sweeps in my gleaning spirit!  
I will kiss free your rapture.  
My tongue, speak delicately of her secret.

Thronged black sky,  
Target that Nimrod's bolt has notched with blemishes of ice,  
Felicity marks each star,  
And not too lonely hangs our heaven;  
Far-gleaming Aldebaran,  
Galaxy's opulent wave,  
The Dioscouri like a falling shaft,  
Proclaim a generous league;  
August and holy  
The Immanent Motive hangs vestigial signs!  
Signs . . . signs . . . what are these signs  
Whose tacit wonders I would dare unfold?  
Signs . . . signs . . . signs . . . signs . . .

Can I reveal, in all these vocal glooms,  
And mock the Recumbent Archer?  
What sterile dreams are these!  
Return, my fancy, to the uncouth air;  
I cannot bruit you now,  
Now, in this place . . .  
O how the wind comes like a cleaving sword!

I do not want to lift myself to those stars,  
Those condoning stars,  
Whose vicissitudes tremble like a child's tin top  
Around a compliant axle;  
For the golden lamp of my cottage beckons return:  
Tis a more sovran eye;  
My mate lies in her bed  
In a shift of green silk . . .  
A dove, a tender dove . . .  
Her small breasts droop like two young moons,  
Her eyelids are like shells that have lain in dew.

## *The White Stone*

SHE was not wise, nor lovelier in her bearing  
Than a smooth white stone;  
The swallow does not flash among the showers,  
The flower not spring from the leaf,  
The foam not fall from the wave,  
Less wise than she, more fair than she;  
But love is not beauty though it is beautiful,  
Nor beauty love though it is loveliness.  
Come you no more, sing low, spring not at all,  
Flower wave and bird—  
My cold white stone is lost.

But time's most ancient tributary stream,  
Love in its gliding brook,  
Still moves in a single true direction,  
Moves to its home in her breast  
Whose love has abandoned me;  
So, through wild slubbering fields,  
The ramp of toad and coney thistle and dock,  
A dyke's clear water creeps  
Beneath the sallows and the clustering crab  
Where mothering birds utter their tender cries.

## *The Dead Garden*

**L**IKE a cold body  
Dead is my garden.  
Its sodden furrows affront me,  
The beet has gone to seed,  
The pea-flower's tangle hangs in rusty husks;  
Wise-mouthed birds have stripped my hedge  
Of the haw's blossom of beads  
And the trinket buds in the bramble.

A lost foxhound watches me from the road;  
I stand so still, he woos me with grave eyes.

Little enough of succour is here  
To cheer him.  
Little enough is in my heart  
Of brightness.  
Flocks of quivering winds move in the mild sky,  
And the swift birds of twilight  
Have gone silently over the hill;  
They will sleep in the white pit  
That is solaced with dark briars;  
I would that all my thoughts could follow those evening birds  
And my woes be as dumb.

Death is a journeyman god,  
He has never moved my devotions;  
But for all his contracted hours  
That lie uncanceled in eternity  
I would surrender these my ambiguous days:  
For there is something that lives here within me,  
Diffident, sombre,  
Whose tears of tranquillity have long ceased to flow.

## *The Prodigal Son*

**W**HEN I forsook my homely town  
And bade my luck goodbye.  
The lord of freedom flung me down  
His sweet scourge from the sky;  
But all the passionate winds ordained  
His purpose to fulfil  
Blew to a burning goal ungained,  
Left me my idle will.

Sad are the harvests I amass,  
And empty of all grain;  
Thickens the dust upon the grass  
No dews shall wash again;  
Nought can unclog the unconfined  
From pride so falsely kept,  
Nor from my void but living mind  
May its dead dreams be swept.

Ten thousand finer dreams of sleep,  
And old songs sweet to hear,  
Mock at my anguish as I keep  
My journeying elsewhere;  
I would not heed one kingly frown,  
Or yet bequeath one sigh,  
Had I not left my shining town,  
Nor bade my heart goodbye.



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